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(54) Method of cleaning or purifying elastomers and elastomeric articles which are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use

(57) A method of cleaning or purifying elastomers and elastomeric articles which are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use comprises

- (a) performing a first solvent extraction process on the elastomer or elastomeric article using a first solvent so as to substantially remove impurities from the elastomer or elastomeric article;
- (b) subjecting the elastomer or article to a second solvent extraction process using a second solvent to substantially remove residues of said first solvent remaining in the elastomer or article after said first solvent extraction, said second solvent being compatible with the intended use of the elastomer or article and said second solvent being used at a temperature below its critical temperature; and thereafter
- (c) drying the elastomer or article.

The first solvent may be ethanol or an ethanol/water mixture. The second solvent may be water, steam or a hydrofluoroalkane and the article may be a metered dose inhaler.

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A METHOD OF CLEANING OR PURIFYING ELASTOMERS  
AND ELASTOMERIC ARTICLES WHICH ARE INTENDED  
FOR MEDICAL OR PHARMACEUTICAL USE

5           This invention relates to a method of cleaning or  
purifying elastomers and elastomeric articles which  
are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use and in  
particular, although not exclusively, the invention  
has particular applicability to elastomers which are  
10 used in metering valves for pressurised metered dose  
inhalers (MDIs).

Pressurised metered dose inhalers were first  
introduced about thirty years ago for the  
administration of medicaments or drugs, primarily to  
15 the lungs, for the treatment of asthma and other  
airway diseases. Additionally, MDIs have been used  
for the administration of drugs to the lung for  
systemic absorption, for administration to the oral  
cavity and for administration into the nose. All of  
20 these pressurised inhalers utilise aerosol valves that  
meter individual doses. These metering valves are  
constructed of a mixture of metal and/or plastic parts  
and elastomeric rubbers. Various types of elastomeric  
rubber are used in these valves and newer types are  
25 being continually developed to ensure compatibility  
with the various aerosol propellants, to provide  
compatibility with and stability of the drug  
formulation and to ensure that the valve continues to  
perform to specification over the several years of  
30 storage required of a pharmaceutical product. One  
consequence of this protracted storage of aerosol  
packs in which the propellants are in intimate contact  
with the metering valve is that materials are leached  
or extracted from the elastomeric rubbers into the  
35 drug formulation. These materials which may be

extracted from the elastomeric rubbers are a mixture of the chemical ingredients originally used to make the rubber and also new chemicals produced during the vulcanisation of the rubber. These are undesirable in the finished rubber component as they may cause instability of the formulation and/or degradation of the drug substance and therefore loss of potency, or they may impart objectionable tastes or odours to the product and could in extreme cases cause allergic or toxic reactions.

Both the pharmaceutical manufacturers and the valve manufacturers have been aware of the above problems associated with the use of elastomeric rubber compounds and various approaches have been employed to reduce the extractable chemical materials contained in the rubbers. The main approaches have been to formulate rubbers that will provide a lower level of extractable chemical materials or to pre-extract impurities from the rubbers before assembly into the metering valve. Because the final intended use of the product is for administration of drugs, the choice of extraction solvent which can be used is very limited for safety and toxicity reasons as there will remain in the rubber after solvent extraction a residue of this solvent which will be extracted into the propellant system. For this reason the most common extraction solvent used to pre-extract rubbers has been the chlorofluorocarbon Trichlorofluoromethane [CCl<sub>3</sub>F] (P11) which is included as part of the propellant system in a number of MDIs. Trichlorofluoromethane has a boiling point of 23.8°C and is often called Propellant 11 which is abbreviated to P11. Due to its boiling point the liquid can generally be used at ambient temperatures.

This pre-extraction has been carried out by a

variety of methods ranging from soaking the rubbers in P11 with or without stirring, pumping the P11 through a bed of the rubber components to sophisticated custom-designed extraction apparatus where the material extracted from the rubber is continually removed and the rubber continually provided with a stream of pure P11. These methods generally take several days to achieve extraction although extraction is not complete. The processes are intended to reduce the levels of available extractable chemical materials and it is appreciated that they will not be completely eliminated.

One of the significant factors in the choice of P11 as an extracting solvent is of course that P11 has been used as a propellant in the formulations used in metered dose inhalers and therefore any residual P11 remaining in the rubber after extraction would be compatible with the pharmaceutical formulation in the MDI. However, with the advent of the newer hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) propellants as replacements for the currently used CFCs with new rubber products that had to be developed, it has been the aim to produce such rubbers with lower levels of extractable impurities. However it is impossible to completely eliminate such extractable impurities and therefore there is a continuing need for a solvent extraction process to remove such impurities from the newer rubbers, ethanol being the usual choice of extractant. However, residues of the ethanol or of whatever solvent is used will of course be left in the rubber and will be liable to leaching or diffusion into the pharmaceutical propellant composition of the MDI in which the rubber is used. The newer HFA formulations may or may not contain ethanol but for those that do not it is of course desirable to eliminate or reduce

the residual ethanol in the rubbers because its extraction into the propellant composition may affect the stability of the formulation.

5 In the case of rubbers from which impurities have been extracted using ethanol, one method of reducing the level of ethanol is by heating the rubber to evaporate the solvent. However, this method of removal carries the risk that it may cause degradation of the rubber by oxidation and thereby render the  
10 rubber unsuitable for use in MDIs.

There is thus a continuing problem in the art to produce elastomers and elastomeric articles which are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use and which contain sufficiently low levels of extractable  
15 impurities.

According to the present invention there is provided a method of cleaning or purifying elastomers and elastomeric articles which are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use which method comprises

- 20 (a) performing a first solvent extraction process on the elastomer or elastomeric article using a first solvent so as to substantially remove impurities from the elastomer or elastomeric article;
- 25 (b) subjecting the elastomer or article to a second solvent extraction process using a second solvent to substantially remove residues of said first solvent remaining in the elastomer or article after said first solvent extraction
- 30 process, said second solvent being compatible with the intended medical or pharmaceutical use of the elastomer or article and said second solvent being used at a temperature below its critical temperature; and thereafter
- 35 (c) drying the elastomer or article.

The present invention is particularly applicable to the newer types of non-black rubbers which are suitable for use with the replacement hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) propellants using as the first  
5 extracting solvent, ethanol.

The second extraction solvent is preferably water, which can be used either static or circulated at temperatures up to its boiling point of 100°C. When ethanol is the first extraction solvent it is  
10 envisaged that the most sufficient extraction would be obtained using water at a temperature of at least 78.5°C, i.e. the boiling point of ethanol, up to 100°C, or to use steam autoclaving of the rubber component using temperatures in the range of for example 100°C  
15 to 150°C.

It should be mentioned that in the conventional one stage process of solvent extraction of impurities from rubbers intended for medical or pharmaceutical use, it is a common practice to clean the products to  
20 remove dirt, dust and other surface contaminants, for example by washing with water. It should be clearly understood however that such a subsequent washing process is not to be confused with the second solvent extraction process used in the method of the present  
25 invention in which when the second extracting solvent is water either the period of contact of the rubber with the water and/or the temperature of the treatment are likely to be significantly longer than the washing step of the prior art which is directed to the removal  
30 of surface contaminants. For example, when using water as the second extractant solvent it is preferable to use a temperature above ambient temperature and/or to carry out the extraction for a period of several hours, for example at least six  
35 hours in order to produce a significant reduction in

the residue of the first extractant solvent in the rubber.

Methods of performing the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art, who will need little if any specific guidance on the procedures which can be adopted in order to obtain the benefits of the present invention. However, the following are some outline examples of possible ways in which the method of the present invention can be put into effect.

#### Example 1

Rubber components that have been ethanol extracted are allowed to soak in distilled water for 24 hours at room temperature. The water is then drained off and the residual surface water on the components removed by a combination of spin or tumble drying and a flow of warm air up to 50°C for 10 minutes.

#### Example 2

Rubber components that have been ethanol extracted are placed in distilled water which is heated to boiling for 4 hours. The components are removed from the water and dried as in Example 1.

#### Example 3

Rubber components that have been ethanol extracted are autoclaved with steam at 115°C to 116°C for 30 minutes and dried by the use of vacuum.

#### Example 4

Rubber components that have been ethanol extracted are immersed in a HFA propellant, kept below its boiling by cooling, for 2 hours. The rubbers are

then removed and the residual HFA allowed to evaporate off at room temperature.

5       It should be understood that the above Examples are merely illustrative and do not limit the present invention as defined in the following claims, in any way.



CLAIMS:

1. A method of cleaning or purifying elastomers and elastomeric articles which are intended for medical or pharmaceutical use which method comprises
  - (a) performing a first solvent extraction process on the elastomer or elastomeric article using a first solvent so as to substantially remove impurities from the elastomer or elastomeric article;
  - (b) subjecting the elastomer or article to a second solvent extraction process using a second solvent to substantially remove residues of said first solvent remaining in the elastomer or article after said first solvent extraction process, said second solvent being compatible with the intended medical or pharmaceutical use of the elastomer or article and said second solvent being used at a temperature below its critical temperature; and thereafter
  - (c) drying the elastomer or article.
2. A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein said first solvent is ethanol or an ethanol/water mixture such as an ethanol/water azeotrope.
3. A method as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 wherein said second solvent is water or steam.
4. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein said second solvent is a constituent of a composition which will or may come into contact with said elastomer or article in said medical or pharmaceutical use.

5. A method as claimed in Claim 4 wherein said medical or pharmaceutical use is in a metered dose inhaler.

5 6. A method as claimed in Claim 5 wherein said second solvent is a hydrofluoroalkane, for example P134a or P227.

10 7. A method as claimed in Claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the specific Examples.



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Examiner: Miss Maureen M.  
Kelman

Claims searched: 1 to 7

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**Patents Act 1977**  
**Search Report under Section 17**

**Databases searched:**

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.O): C3L LBK LBL LBN

Int Cl (Ed.6): B01D 11/00, 11/02; C08C 3/00, 3/02, 4/00; C08F 6/00, 6/26, 6/28

Other: ONLINE: CHABS, CLAIMS, JAPIO, RAPRA, WPI

**Documents considered to be relevant:**

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
A	WO 95/18834 A1 MINNESOTA MINING	

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.